

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

CHARLES READE'S LAST NOVEL.
A PERILOUS SECRET. By CHARLES READE. Harper & Brothers.

The reader is apt to look for symptoms of decadence in the final work of a writer whose death occurs soon after its completion; but while Charles Reade's last story is certainly not one of his best, there are few if any traces in it of failing power. That it does not reach the level of "Never Too Late To Mend," or "Hard Cash" is rather owing to its greater condensation than to any lack of interest in the plot or skill in the execution. It would seem that the author's masterful realism, which stood him in good stead, in earlier years, became toward the last rather a hindrance than a help. By cultivating this tendency too much he made more apparent his want of imagination, and "A Perilous Secret" produces the impression that the skeleton of the story has in some places not been properly filled up. In this last novel there is moreover no ulterior purpose. It is not written to expose or to advocate anything. It is simply a dramatic tale, containing abundance of the rapid, exciting action and brilliant description characteristic of the writer, but embodying no special advocacy of anything. In the naming of the characters we are forced to note that "Grace" and "Julia" were favorites with Charles Reade. He introduces these names repeatedly in his books, though he does not attach the importance Dickens did to names, never attempting like the latter, to select names in some subtle way expressive of the characters of those who bear them. "A Perilous Secret" has of course a villain. Reade's villains are always eminently dramatic, and yet quite unnatural. In this instance, indeed, there may be said to be two villains; one reclaimable and possessed of redeeming qualities; the other irreclaimable, and detestable from beginning to end. The pernicious secret is known to so many people even at its inception that it can hardly be called a secret. It is a case of substitution, a living child being put in the place of a dead one, to secure the enjoyment of a large sum of money. The father of this child William Hope, is the best character in the book; but he is so good a man that it is difficult to believe him capable of deliberate and long-sustained participation in the fraud. The female characters are not so full as usual with Mr. Read's of those delightful contradictions which he thought characteristic of the sex. There is no woman here to be compared with "Zoe" in "The Woman Hater," for instance, but Grace and Julia are nevertheless very feminine and interesting.

Several of the situations are strong, as for example, the firing of the coal mine and the rescue of the buried people. But the bane with which the tale is told, as though the author knew that he had little time at his disposal, interferes with the development and mars the harmony of the plot, by so hurriedly the reader that he has not opportunity to reflect upon the swift and sudden changes. This hasty almost justifies the conclusion that Mr. Reade at first intended to write a play, and then expanded his material into novel form. To describe the plot would be unfair both to author and reader. Suffice it to say that if any less distinguished writer had produced "A Perilous Secret" it would have been considered a great success; and that if it cannot be regarded under existing circumstances it is only because the author has set his own standard so high by his earlier achievements. But he is not at his best here, his second-best is excellent, and his last story will certainly not detract from his reputation, if it does not increase it.

BOOKS OF THE WEEK.

Mrs. NANCY. 16mo. pp. 254. (Philadelphia: David McKay.)
THE LOVE LETTER ANSWERED. By Nine Authors. 16mo. pp. 212. (Harper & Brothers.)

"ISN'T IT?" OR, THE LOVE LETTER ANSWERED. By Wilkie Collins. 16mo. pp. 233. (Harper & Brothers.)

POEMS. By Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 12mo. pp. 206. (Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.)

A DOUBLE LIFE. By Herbert E. Chase. 16mo. pp. 301. (Scribner, Armstrong & Son.)

EXPENSIVE SAYING. A Cause of Commercial Distress. By Uriel H. Crocker. 8vo. pp. 40. (Boston: W. B. Clarke & Carruth.)

INFIDEL OBJECTIONS. By the Rev. F. R. Whitmore. 16mo. pp. 272. (Thomas Nelson & Sons.)

THE GREAT REPUBLIC. By Sir L. H. Griffin. 12mo. pp. 180. (See also "Welford.")

LITTLE JESUS KAHL. By Frederick Kapp. 12mo. pp. 337. (Open Court Co.)

BUILDING AND RUINING THE REPUBLIC. By James P. Boyd. A. M. 8vo. pp. 784. (Philadelphia: Bradley, Garrison & Co.)

ACADEMY. By Mrs. S. B. Graham Clark. 16mo. pp. 365. (See also "Welford" & Co.)

A HISTORY OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION. By T. W. B. H. Abbott. 12mo. pp. 99. (Boston: Ginn, Heath & Co.)

A HUNDRED BATTLES IN THE WEST. By Captain Marshall P. Thatcher. 8vo. pp. 476. (Detroit: The Author.)

THE SHADOW OF THE WAR. 16mo. pp. 378. (Chicago: James McClure & Co.)

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CHARLES READE'S LAST ESSAY.

THE KINDLY JEST. In Redpath's Weekly, No. 383; out this morning; 6 cents.

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